

Written Testimony

To Madam Chair, Dian Rice
And Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: James H. Gustafson
Date: February 5, 2007
RE: Comments on HB 452 and amendments

Madam Chair, Diane Rice, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My Name is James H. Gustafson and I live at 725 2nd Av, S. #25, Great Falls MT 59405. I am a concerned citizen and would like to express my support for HB 452 and the amendments to it.

I have been incarcerated for eight years and have discharged my prison sentence on July 5, 2006, with approximately 18 months left on my suspended sentence. Since my discharge I have taken the Wellness Recovery Action Plan class offered by the Center for Mental Health in Great Falls. I have taken the Peer Support Employment Training that was taught by Chris Martin, who is the Director of Training for META Services, INC. in Phoenix Arizona. This class is worth three college credits in Arizona and certifies me to be a Peer Support Specialist. I am also enrolled to take the Wellness Recovery Action Plan Facilitator training later in this month. I am a member of the Peer Support Oversight Committee and currently the Administrative Assistant for the Crisis Peer Support Pilot Project in Great Falls. I have just recently been appointed to the Great Falls Mental Health Local Service Authority Board and I also volunteer at Opening Doors, which helps people to ease the transition from incarceration to society.

I feel that the sense of accomplishment that a person gets when they work to get their GED or a college diploma and the future benefits of a good paying job, will keep people from returning back into the system. Now add the incentive of reduced time on a person's Parole, you have further reduced the chance of that person returning back into the system significantly.

As Montana is hard pressed to balance the budget and find money to keep programs and departments funded, HB 452 will not cost the State money. It will be beneficial to the State, by saving the State money and improving people's lives.

In closing the education that I have taken since my discharge and the work that I am doing now have improved the quality of my life and I am proud to be a productive member of society.

Madam Chair and Members of the Judicial Committee, I thank you for your time.